

INCOMING TELEGRAM

Laos
Department of State

33-31

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Action

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Rec'd: January 8, 1959
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FE

FROM: Vientiane

Info

TO: Secretary of State

RMR

NO: 1192, January 8, 4 p.m.

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Reference DEPTTEL 806.

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1. Embassy has been seeking determine juridical basis of frontier between Laos and Vietnam. Preliminary indications from French advisor who was senior functionary in Laos before war are as follows.

A. Entire frontier between two countries was surveyed However only between Lao provinces of Thakhek and Savannakhet and corresponding Vietnamese provinces was frontier made subject of a decree in 1916. Along rest of frontier survey teams established horizontal control points and drew maps by connecting these.

B. In area northeast of Tchepone, which is one point of alleged Viet Minh penetration, frontier follows straight line. Reason is that when team followed watershed line, which was basis for delineating most of frontier, it discovered that frontier would penetrate part of east in areas which clearly Vietnamese. Therefore rather than hold up work for more thorough study of problem, it was decided to draw straight line between two horizontal points and postpone study until later. In fact however although matter was discussed numerous times nothing was done until 1937 when it was discovered agents of court at Hue here collecting taxes

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taxes west of this frontier. A study of area then revealed that Vietnamese influence had penetrated well west of this line. French therefore drew a new line forming roughly an isoscles triangel with straight segment of frontier as base line and apex 23 kilometers west of base line center. This triangle encompassed area of Vietnamese influence and French ordered Vietnamese not penetrated beyond this newline. However with advent of war new line never formally determined at frontier and matter has been left unresolved.

C. Three Viet Minh units reported to have penetrated into Tchepone area north of Bang Hieng River are located in above traingle once recognize by French as having come under Vietnamese influence . (We know of no unit near ban Nathon).

D. Similar frontier difficulties have arisen also with GVN since 1954.

2. Report of PAVN incursion in Khammounae province (EMBTel 1157), [redacted] which however deduced estimate of PAVN unit to 12 men.

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3. Re alleged penetration of Xieng Khouang, ANL discounts police report Viet Minh force moving into Lao territory [redacted]

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4. French counselor's information on Viet Minh penetration most probably based on French military attache report which was sent two days ago. However our information which derives from same sources as summarized in paragraphs 1 C, 2 and 3 above.. See USARMA reports for complete coverage.

5. We have no indication of Phoui-Souphanouvong talk along reported lines [redacted]

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6. Embassy strongly considers it not in interest of Laos to get involved at this juncture in hassle over frontier. Such a development would again absorb attention, time and energies of government to detriment of more real and serious problems confronting country. Minor frontier pentrations have been reported

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reported last few months but RLG did not take public cognizance of them until receipt recent spate of messages from Pham Van Dong. It still appears most probable that Viet Minh, in making frontier question public issue, are seeking put RLG under further pressure in order give support to NLHX, French to obtain eventual return ICC, or both. Therefore believe RLG should be encouraged to play it cool and not be drawn into heated polemics.

7. Recommend that Department withhold taking position until we have clearer idea situation and merits Lao case. Also recommend that friendly powers and particularly Thailand and Vietnam avoid exacerbating situation by allowing exaggerated reports to circulate such as have been appearing Bangkok press.

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